

Creating Community: Rationale for Communities of Practice

A *Community of Practice (CoP)* is quite simply a group of people that agree to interact regularly to solve a persistent problem or improve practice in an area that is important to them. CoPs exist in many forms, some large in scale and dealing with complex problems, others small in scale and focused on a problem at a very specific level. CoPs are a way of working that invite the groups that have a stake in an issue to be a part of the problemsolving. The CoP develops its own schedule or 'rhythm' for interacting and creates mechanisms to communicate that give access to all the members.

The IDEA Partnership applies the CoP framework to the shared implementation of IDEA. Through the CoP approach, we:

- bring diverse organizations into a working relationship around their common interests
- bring stakeholders into the work of state education agencies as allies
- bring fresh approaches to persistent problems by uniting decision makers, practitioners and consumers around a common goal

As partner organizations work with each other and with States, they identify shared interests. Shared interests are powerful motivators that can move people to come together for extraordinary results. When stakeholders become allies with state agencies to improve the existing system, great things become possible. In the CoP, members learn from each other and take action together in coordinated ways. IDEA Partner organizations choose to participate in a CoP based on the value it can add their organization.

Just as the CoP strategy is valuable to organizations; states also see the value. Over 33 states now chose to participate in Communities of Practice at some level. For states, CoPs provide a way to learn from and with those closest to the work. Stakeholders have expertise that cannot be known by those in other roles. By uniting decision makers, practitioners and consumers, the state agency has a powerful new lens through which to view challenges and opportunities. As well, stakeholders bring well established networks into the CoP that permit information sharing that is faster and deeper. Most importantly, organizational networks help build the deep understanding and ongoing connections necessary to create sustainable change. The Community of Practice is a powerful change strategy.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT COP View the CoP Manual: Communities of Practice: A New Approach for Solving Complex Educational Problems

<http://www.ideapartnership.org/documents/CoP-Collection/CoP-Guidebook.pdf>

If your CoT is struggling with getting partners to the table, please contact the state agency representative that currently serves on the WI Facilitator Leadership Team:

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